



# Lives of the Saints

by Kevin Carter

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Published by The Fiction Circus  
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*For apostles & apostates*

# On Bread Alone



From 6th until 7th grade, I was best friends forever with a girl named Alexandra. Most of the kids in our neighborhood went to public school, and so the two of us naturally gravitated to each other since sisters of mercy carrying yardsticks told us that public school kids were more likely to be in league with the Dark One. She lived five doors down, and we filled our days with most of the same things: TV, junk food, and going outside until haloed streetlamps turned on at dusk.

There was plenty of whispering about Vatican II taking beautiful Latin away from us, the increasing liberalization of the church, and changes to the holy liturgy around the school. Because parents began threatening to take their tuition money elsewhere if changes weren't made, the school became increasingly reactionary out of necessity. The curriculum shifted from Catholic kids' magazines to lives of the martyrs and saints. Most of the kids in class SQ3Red their way through the questions at the end of the chapters, but as I was forced to read through them, I started to become interested. The men and women in the books had such close relationships with God that it was like finding a secret history of angels, a massive tome published only in heaven, hidden histories that finally bestowed the long-awaited gift of clarity. To me, they were Krishna and Arjuna or Leda and the Swan.

Alexandra and I started talking about the stories between classes, and after that, we started talking about them at lunch too. The gross fascination with the saints was rewarded by the nuns who became more liberal with gold stars and bathroom

passes, along with our parents, who showed us off at dinner parties. Isn't it adorable that she knows all about St. Stephen? Alex and I received threats of ostracization from our lunch table after a month or so of doing this, so we cleaned up our act during lunch. We would still go over to each other's houses at night to watch new TV shows or fuss with each other's hair, but for the most part, we talked about the saints and how much we admired them. We became fast friends with the school librarian, who was impressed at our lust for knowledge and let us have access to the stacks where the adult works were stored too, shelves that were off-limits to the other students.

It was the day of our confirmation. Her parents had forced her to wait until 12, since they thought this was a proper age for a child to make a decision about their ultimate spiritual path. Before 12 was too early to her parents, but Alexandra knew many children—some of the evangelical Christians in the neighborhood—who had accepted the Lord so long ago. They told her their stories of asking Jesus to come into their heart when they were 2 or 3, and Alexandra felt secretly jealous. How had they gotten the opportunity to know so much sooner about the Lord than she had? How could a 2 or 3 year old who understood nothing of the Church or Christ ever possibly make a decision about their ultimate path in life when they couldn't walk without bumping into walls? Alexandra told me she didn't understand. But now she was 12, the Bishop had traveled from the city to St. Paul's for Mass, and her mother had bought her a special dress for the occasion, seeing her excitement and encouraging her child in her intense faith and obedience.

I was there in church and watched her take the host in her mouth and drink the blood at Mass. Transubstantiation was a moment of agony and ecstasy for her: the agony of the wait and the ecstasy of Christ on her tongue, accepting His body physically into her body. I saw it in her face: fervorous smile, eyes closed, head tilted back. This spiritual transcendence was finally taking place in the physical for her, and the whole thing had become so real: the

body of Christ was now part of her body.

I went to her house for pot roast after Mass. Alexandra said she wasn't hungry; her father ate her portion instead. We went up to her room after lunch, and she told me about the vision she had during Communion, enraptured as the Lord Jesus Christ appeared before her, telling her how proud He was of her, His good and faithful servant. He said that from now on she should cast out unclean foods from her body and take only of Communion. I thought it was strange, but in a way, it made sense to me. According to her logic, the only heavenly being which exists on Earth is Christ through his gift of His body and blood. Everything else was corrupted by the fallen world, and everything else was sin. He was the only perfect food; He was her daily bread.

Alexandra attempted to eat nothing else for a month. Her weeks were an unbearable wait that culminated in the moment when she was allowed to make the Heavenly substance part of her body. When her parents eventually forced her to start eating, she would appease them before kneeling in front of the toilet later, expelling the sin from herself. I even tried it for a few days, but when I prayed to God during my fast, He told me that it wasn't necessary; I was already pure of sin. This came after dreaming about a bountiful feast in Heaven the night before, when mountains of my favorite dinner sat on the table before me. I told Alexandra she needed to pray hard about what she was doing, and she looked at me with pity before telling me that she had already been praying and was praying right then too.

I asked Alex about confession, if she had told Father Luke about her plan to only eat the Communion wafers. She told me that she had nothing to confess, that this was her predestined path. I remember that Father Luke had spoken a few weeks before of Joseph and his coat of many colors. Jacob had given his son Joseph the beautiful coat, and Jacob warned Joseph not to wear it in front of his brothers, since he knew that their jealousy would overtake them. Communion was a beautiful secret coat for her,

one that was necessarily her secret with God. Soon after, it was apparent that she wouldn't talk to me about it anymore.

She hid it for a while, until her mother overheard her late one night after she had prepared her daughter's favorite meal: spaghetti and garlic bread. They took her to a doctor, and he told them Alexandra needed to see a psychologist. Her parents were inherently distrustful of therapists and decided that what would be best for her was to simply change the idea in her mind that she needed to throw up. Alex was silent when they asked her why she was doing it and assumed it was because she didn't like her body, that someone had made fun of her in school. She was afraid that people would be jealous of her vision, of Christ telling her to dwell on Him alone.

When Alex had her next confession, her devotion was a secret no more. I'm sure she saw this as a sign that now it was time to wear her beautiful coat out in the world in plain view. Father Luke asked her about it at confession, the vision that she had. She told Father that she was sure that this was a spirit of truth. Father Luke, his mind inundated with the stories of the way the Church used to be, mystical and pulsing with vibrancy, decided to let her continue taking Communion. When he spoke to the girl, this woman of God, he did not find sin within her.

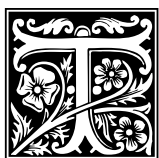
Alexandra went to the hospital a week later. They shot fluids into her, terrible IVs with tubes pushing nutrition through her body. I went to see her in the hospital. We prayed together, but Alex's vision was too strong in her mind to make any real sense. If she died, she would be a martyr.

Around the time she was released, my parents took me out of my school, and I started to go to one an hour away. I wasn't allowed to see Alex anymore; she made my parents uncomfortable. I saw Alex's body at her funeral one year later. Fervorous smile, eyes closed, head tilted back.

# Surd Evil

“In some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.”

-William L. Rowe



here was a perfect forest created by a god named Sakra. Sakra was said by the people who lived in His forest to be omnipresent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent. Sakra was sacred to the people of the forest; slander of His holy name was punishable by expiration. He was made purely of diamonds, electrical diamonds which shot out life-giving sparks. Sakra held a sceptre in His hand, and power flowed through it, daring anyone to contradict His established law. The law was deference.

Sadhu was a farmer in the forest, and he followed the law. He taught the art of meditation during twilit reveries in celebration of the land. All creations which were pure were Sakric. All creations which were not pure were not Sakric, and thus were not creations. These things became not-things. Sadhu's orthodoxy was admirable. But there was a not-thought which dwelled in Sadhu's mind, a not-thought which would have been banishable if it existed to be banished. This was the not-thought that even not-things existed to give glory to Sakra.

One day in the dusk blue between twilit and moonlit sky, Sadhu walked into the forest. The Tree of Sakra was there, and he counted the thousands and ten thousands of leaves as he stared up. Above it, stars fascinated him in their luminescence,



each signifying another perfect world created by Sakra. It was a moment when not-things and not-thoughts vanished, and an immaculate sense of understanding filled him purely, like white cream in a saucer.

Sadhu was one of Sakra's most fervent followers, and even the elders of the town admired him. But during moments of contemplation, he wondered whether there could be a reason to admire anyone at all. In Sakric law, it was written that all were diamonds: glistening, pure, unbreakable, and valuable. But what gave diamonds value in a perfect world?

And why was he himself more well-respected than the other people of the forest? It was said that he was a great Sakran, but how could he be hailed as a paragon of virtue when all people lived according to the code as Sakra had intended? Furthermore, when Sadhu criticized people, did that make him a not-person? He remembered when his grandfather, who had once been a brilliant thinker, faded into a not-thing, a not-person. He was taken by elders outside of the forest while Sadhu watched. When Sadhu's grandfather was on the horizon, his mother put her hands over his eyes. When she took her hands away, Sadhu's grandfather was a not-person. His mother cried not-tears for the night, and then there were no more not-tears.

Sadhu's wife was dear to him, and he valued her as the brightest diamond he knew. They had not known each other well until they were adults, but they became fast friends, then faster lovers. Their love blossomed like a single web built by thousands of spiders. The web covered everything Sadhu knew, from his lyre to his bed. But when they fought, their words became voids. Sadhu knew that although these voids themselves were not-things, the tenderness and regret which followed between them bore redemptive beauty. Their inevitable reconciliations could never happen if the voids themselves were not also part of Sakra's plan.

Sadhu doubted his own mind but was content otherwise. Lights of the forest soothed his worries, but it was approaching darkness and beginning to rain. Sadhu did not like rain, but it was indisputably Sakric, so he knew it was good. The discrepancy between his emotions and the ways of Sakra was a burden on him. Then, a voice spoke to Sadhu, a voice heard by his ancestors before him.

“Sadhu, your doubts are not-doubts because I am your Creator, and I would never cause you to question perfection. I am Sakra. I am the Diamond Sceptre that sweeps through the sky. I am the Lightning Spectre that infused the shells with life. Know that I am Sakra and walk steadfastly in the ways of righteousness from this day on.”

Sadhu marveled at Sakra’s manifestation, and he cried in wisdom and joy. He lifted his diamond necklace in the air and kissed it, magnifying Sakra’s doubtless ways. Sadhu then walked back to his house, shared a meal with his family, and went to sleep.

That very night in the forest where Sadhu contemplated the mysteries, a spear of electricity connected with a tree, transmogrifying it into a brilliant diamond fire. A lone fawn, wandering from its home, found itself with nowhere to escape to. The flame encircled it and seared its flesh, turning all in its path into scorched diamond ash.

# Selah



They were both my friends, which makes it hard to tell this story. I've known Brian since high school, and I gave Lisa the seal of approval to date him right after they met. She was cool. My ex-girlfriend and I hung out with them a lot, because we had weird stuff in common. For some reason, all of us gravitated towards musicology and ancient Japanese art, among other things, so we always had a lot to talk about. My ex and I broke up; they got closer. When they got married a few years ago, Brian wrote her a poem. I remember one line in particular, something that seemed like Brian would never ever say in real life: "nestled in blankets." I thought they were a good match.

Brian was an evangelical atheist until the day April Noël was born. He was the kind who would do everything except go door to door to convince Christians of their own stupidity, like there would be a heavenly crown in his honor for every soul he kept from accepting the existence of Moses or whatever. It seemed like that was the only real problem they had as a couple, but it didn't seem like a big deal to me. Lots of people get together just fine despite that. You could have a Jewish mom and a Buddhist dad, and it's not a big deal.

Brian talked to me pretty soon after he found out that Lisa was pregnant. He told me that it was becoming obvious based on his discussions with her that something was going to change when the baby was born. And it wasn't going to be the easy stuff, like not staying out as late or not smoking so much weed. It was going to be a fundamental change in the way that both of them lived their lives. Lisa had told Brian that they needed to come to

terms with the disconnect between their philosophies. She was a Christian (nothing crazy, just Lutheran), and she believed that a child needed a good moral foundation. Brian fought back and told her that he could provide a good moral foundation without a god, but she wasn't buying that. Lisa wanted the child to be raised Christian. Ultimately, it came down to self-sacrifice. Brian agreed that he would go along with it, mostly because it was going to be hard to have the conversation about where all of this came from when she was 10. He agreed on one condition: he might talk the talk, but he wouldn't walk the walk.

The baby was big enough that the doctor recommended a C-section. They planned a Sunday afternoon to go in and have the procedure done. I met up with Brian for lunch to talk about business stuff on Saturday, but I could tell that he wasn't exactly doing well. We were working on a deal for a mutual client, but he was completely unresponsive when I asked him about the most basic aspects of what he was doing to push it through. A baby's a big change, yeah, and I've seen guys get cold feet about this sort of thing before, but it was ridiculous. I did the best thing I could think of in the situation. I did the opposite of what Lisa wanted: told Brian I had an emergency meeting I had to run to, but that we should meet a little later to grab drinks.

We met up at the club we used to go to before he got married, and it was a wild night, a last hurrah before he was a dad. Booze, tits, lines, and rock and roll in a fast car. I dropped him off at home at like 6, drove home, and went to bed.

I had stuff to do on Sunday, and we were friends, but I didn't want to pry. I finally got a call from the hospital on Monday afternoon telling me that she had the baby, so I got my stuff together and took the rest of the day off. I had done a slightly illegal favor for one of my co-workers a few weeks before, and he had given me a box of Cubans in exchange, so I brought what was left of them over too.

I like going into a hospital right after a baby is born. It's the only good reason to be in one, really. It looks so nice, with all the pastels and baby paraphernalia. I stopped at the little convenience store in the lobby and bought a bouquet of flowers. The woman at the counter said daffodils were the best for a newborn. I went to the front desk, found out the room, and went up. Lisa was on the far side of the room, so I got a quick glimpse of the mother on the near side of the curtain as I walked by. She was drugged up and serene, holding her child with the dad close by.

There was something immediately wrong with the atmosphere on the far side of the curtain. Lisa was holding the baby, April Noël Athos. 9 pounds and 3 ounces, 21 and a half inches long, brown eyes, no hair yet. Brian was sitting on a chair smiling and whispering something to himself, and there was a nurse in there, but she didn't really seem like she was doing anything. I said my hellos, congratulated both of them awkwardly, and handed the flowers to Brian. He just looked at me and smiled broadly, kept whispering to himself, and put them on the little table next to Lisa.

Lisa thanked me for the flowers, and she seemed out of it. She was in labor for 20 hours, so that was logical. But Brian seemed more confused than she did. He barely said hi and was just sort of a non-entity in the corner. The nurse walked out of the room for a minute and came right back. When she came back in, she told me that she needed to check a few things for Lisa, and she asked if I could leave the room for a minute. I said sure and walked out.

There was a doctor waiting outside who asked if I was a member of the family or a friend. I told him I was a friend, and he had the grave countenance that you usually see when you watch doctors on TV. He told me what was going on: Brian hadn't stopped singing the whole day. He had been carrying a red letter pocket New Testament with the Proverbs and Psalms, and he had been singing the whole time.

I got the whole story later from Lisa, but apparently she had been

looking for Brian when she woke up on Sunday. She saw his car in the driveway and knew he couldn't be far. She found him in the park sitting down with a notebook. He had used the lines of the notebook paper to create crude treble staves and was scribbling notes on them manically, singing the whole time. She said that he was singing at the top of his lungs, probably waking up the neighbors. She knew he was on something. I can take the blame for part of that. We used to do all this crazy shit when we were younger, ayahuasca and acid, and there were some nights spent staring out the window convinced that the authorities had been catching on for a long time and were lined up out on the street. She asked him if he took acid. "Did you take acid, how much did you take?" But Brian shook his head no. We had done a couple of bags of coke, nothing more. He kept singing the whole time. She called the doctor and tried to reschedule the appointment and told him that they were having family problems, but the doctor said that based on the nature of the pregnancy and the stage that the baby was at, it would be unwise to postpone things any longer. Plus Lisa figured he was going to snap out of it by the time they got to the hospital. They went back to the house, him singing the entire time. Lisa grabbed the emergency bag, and they took a cab there.

By the time they got to the hospital, Lisa couldn't handle dealing with him, and he still hadn't snapped out of it yet. Supposedly a few of the nurses wanted to take him to emergency psych since he was so unresponsive, but they decided against it for Lisa's sake.

I didn't even want to think about the delivery and everything surrounding it. At least I was here now, and I had to atone for what I had done. Brian kept singing and looking down at the Bible in front of him. The lyrics were all psalms. King David's psalms. That's what he had been singing the whole time. I finally got him to quiet down the singing down a little, telling him he was scaring Lisa. He at least did that.

Lisa was exhausted now, and the whole room carried a weariness I had never felt before. No one knew what to do. The nurse asked me to take Brian out of the room for a little while. I went out of the room telling Lisa that April was beautiful and not to worry. Guilt was an anvil in my stomach.

Brian and I had some safe words from back during the experimental days, and I told him that his name was Brian Athos that I saw the fnords too. That was this stupid code phrase we used to remind each other we were regular people and that we weren't being wiretapped by DoD agents, no one was after us after all, and everything was going to be okay. His eyes lit up with a spark of recognition and recollection, but he shook his head and kept singing. It was like it was some surreal musical where one character was singing and the rest of the cast didn't know what the fuck was going on. We were all missing his lyrics sheet.

The good news was that Brian was starting to fade. This fantastically horrific day was wearing him down. I drove him back to my place so he could get some sleep somewhere other than a waiting room. On the way back I kept trying to shake him out of it, saying the meanest fucking things I could think of, saying, "Listen, why do you think everyone is looking at you like this?" Saying, "Don't you know you have a fucking wife and a baby in that room that need you? Whatever is going on in your head, snap the fuck out of it." He didn't say anything. Kept singing, his eyes glued to the passenger side window, singing out his psalms about how the Lord would deliver him from his enemies.

He finally fell asleep on my sofa bed that night. I knew at that point that there were two ways this could go. Either he becomes a life-long crazy, or he realizes what he's been doing. I was just hoping that he would wake up and be okay again.

Eight hours later, I heard him moving around downstairs. I went down and checked on him, and he was in shock. He just kept saying, "Oh my God, what have I done?" He sobbed and told me

that it all seemed so real to him, that the world was going to end if he stopped singing. He knew it for a fact. He knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt that it was his duty to sing psalms to the Lord for all the days of his life, without ceasing, like Paul wrote. And now it wasn't. He started trying to sing again and then stopped immediately, realizing the world hadn't ended, realizing he was wrong. I tried to calm him down, telling him that horrible shit happens to people, that people snap, but it was going to be okay, everything was going to be okay.

But there was nothing I could say to make everything okay, because what is sadder than hearing the voice of God followed by silence?



# Loft Party



apis lazuli eyeshadow, exposed pipes, and Scandinavian metal greeted Brendan as he opened the loft door. There was no welcome mat. Eyelashes windshield-wiped and obsidian eyeliner mixed into the canvas, turning the delicate pockets holding the eyes a deep, dark violent violet. Marble blended with lapis in a kind of contact metamorphism. The pipes carried electricity, tap water, gas, cable, and sewage around the makeshift apartment. The door was makeshift too, cardboard which created a portal in a sheet of knockoff imitation cardboard which was designated as a wall. The allure of the hue, like ambient lights reflecting in a new age opium den, enraptured and entranced him.

“Hey, what’s up? You can put the beer in the fridge for now.” That was Liza. It was her loft. It was her oil paint smearing on skin like pure pigment settling on a peach countertop after floating in the air. And now it was her walking across the room to talk to some guido about the coke delivery.

Brendan’s arm twitched twice. He was hypersensitive to stimuli. His mother had always told him that. And two arm twitches with pain told him to back away. Two arm twitches without pain, if he felt bloodflow on the other hand, meant that he was right. One of his homunculi told him, “You’re a good person, Brendan. Keep doing what you’re doing.” He fingered a pill in his pocket. “Now would be a bad time to take the medicine, Brendan. Keep doing a good job and listen to the twitches. You know how hard it is to interpret the twitches when you take the medicine.” He took his hand out of his pocket and let the capsule fall to the soft cloth seam at the bottom. The homunculi were like navigators—

backseat drivers, really—but Brendan was the one ultimately in control of the car. He had the keys. The homunculi were non-corporeal, but he could make those limbs move, make them stretch out if he knew for sure that a twitch or an itch would guide him the wrong way. He cleared his throat, and the sound reverberated and resonated through the refrigerator. He made room for the 6-pack and set it down. The first homunculus—the one who had guided him through the twitches—was a little gnome who was silly sometimes but mostly serious. He had a large red nose and eyes that insisted he spoke the truth. His imaginary physical representation only appeared when Brendan wasn't paying enough attention to him.

The party was full of plenty of stimuli for Brendan to interpret, and he created new semiological systems with each new synapse firing in his brain. A Sharpie painting of a forlorn-looking woman with a long black dress was hanging on the wall at the other corner of the loft. Brendan couldn't see far enough to know it, but the painting was signed by someone named The\_Marauder. Obviously, Brendan knew this painting was a portal to a universe of ineffable desolation, and the closer he got to it, the more he could feel the spirits descend. The\_Marauder didn't even know what the word desolation meant, but he knew beyond reasonable doubt – beyond the shadow of a doubt – that this painting meant death. He slunk away from it, terrified of going through the portal. The doctor said this was Brendan's problem: his surety, his certainty in interpretation. Everyone reads the signs, but the healthy ones stay unsure. That wasn't exactly what the doctor said, but it was mostly.

The second homunculus began to converse with the first. This one was tall and gaunt, with a small, thin face. "You fucking idiot, you always do the same fucking thing. If you keep doing this shit, they won't even let you go out anymore. Don't you remember the hospital, the way that kind nurse looked at you with so much pity and simultaneous hate? You go crazy with the twitches, scare people, the paramedics come, and you wind up hooked up to a

haliperidol drip trying to get some sleep on a too-small ER bed. How long can you do that before you become a life-long crazy?" Just as the second homunculus finished his monologue, he could feel the first taking precedence again.

"What if each time you get the drip, they've caught you and they're controlling you?" asked the gnome's nose. "You're always fine until they give you the drip. You're one with everything. You have certainty, you have purpose, and that—"

"Oh shit, the keg is kicked. Fucking sucks. It's only 12:30. Where's the fucking beer, man?" The guy was looking at Brendan. "Yo, can I borrow a stoge?"

"What?" asked Brendan.

"A stoge, a bogey. Cig."

"Uh, yeah," Brendan said. He didn't hesitate before handing the guy a cigarette.

The gnome homunculus grew visible in his mind again, hairy ears slightly offset. "What, you want to end up like him? Do you think he has any purpose? Any gift for prophecy like you've shown? What does he know of the future? What does he even know of the present? Hey dick, why are you here? To get fucked up? To get some pussy?"

Brendan's upbringing, some strain of agnostic humanism in his parents, acted as counterbalance. He wouldn't say that. But he looked to the guy like he might.

"Where do you live?" asked the guy.

"Around here," said Brendan. "Like 15 minutes."

"Nice. Damn, check that shit out," drooled the guy.

“What a goddamn surprise,” said the gnome, drowning out the protestations of his all-too logical counterpart.

“What a goddamn surprise,” said Brendan.

“What?” said the guy. “Damn, you missed her. Your loss. Okay, I’m gonna go get a drink somewhere. Plenty of half-full beers around. Later.”

Brendan didn’t say goodbye. The first homunculus was right again.

The music had changed to some 8-step-full-on-hardstyle-dub-rampant with musique-concrète influences that would be carved out as a particular sub-sub-genre of a sub-culture next week. It made Brendan uneasy, and he felt nauseated. What was his purpose at this party? It seemed like there was nothing to do. Just a bunch of unprophetic people wandering around trying desperately to silence the gnawing desperation. How were people having fun here? He saw three people making out in a corner. Oh.

Brendan had a girlfriend a few years back. He had courted her heavily. 1-800-FLOWERS.com boxes left at her doorstep by the deliveryman dressed up like a florist, or if he was lucky, making it inside Becca’s office accompanied by a security guard to ensure the integrity of physical goods brought inside the building. They had been out twice: first a movie, unmemorable. Second, a local symphony concert with a woodwinds section that made Brendan scratch his scalp vigorously. But it wasn’t just the woodwinds. He didn’t know it was going to be Wagner. Prelude to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Act of Lohengrin. All Brendan could see were concentration camps when he closed his eyes. There was no separation between the music’s signification and any beauty it had outside of Wagner. So he opened his eyes, and they started appearing in his open-eye perceptions too, soldiers kicking starved prisoners, barbed wire fences. Wagner was the impresario. The piece wasn’t short

enough. Brendan started screaming bloody murder. He was forcibly dragged out; the orchestra played through it all. Becca had been sleeping. Dark concert halls with music playing always made her sleepy. They didn't see each other after that. Brendan knew the conductor was furious. They dragged him out on a stretcher. He was out in a few days. He signed his diagnosis paper without reading it during the evaluation, and that was that. Eat more vitamins. Omega-3. Fish oil. Snake oil. Brendan started reading anti-psychiatry books and journals. Thomas Szasz and shit. He knew he was right about these premonitions. Something was clouding his perceptions when he found out he was wrong. Someone changed everything around on him.

He came to a realization with some of the homunculi's help: his system of interpretation, his hermeneutic method, was different from that of everyone else around him. The decisions he was making were justified by the way he read the signs. It all had this beautiful, elegant internal logic. But because others weren't perceiving the world with the pre-requisite of his gathered experiences, they couldn't comprehend why he would do the things he had done. A profound sense of loneliness followed this. No one could feel a total empathy with him, no one, because it would be impossible to dictate his emotional, mental, and spiritual impressions. That was what he had always longed for: a complete shared experience with another being, the notion of comprehension and two bound wills, but it was ultimately impossible. Becca could have kissed him, yes. She might even have fucked him. But she wouldn't have heard Wagner the same way. Some people say that's beautiful, some uniqueness which allows subjective experience to be had. But Brendan didn't want subjectivity. Once he knew that was impossible, he felt resigned to his fate, and he vowed to live in the only way he could: treating all stimuli as his own and no one else's. He would read the signs, and he alone would interpret the objective signification which all objects were endowed with: why they were there to begin with.

It was this will that kept Brendan solid in his convictions, clinging

to them despite the doctors who claimed they were irrational and exhibited signs of dangerous and psychopathic behavior. The intensity of what he stood for, which was how each of the symbols would direct his life and the lives of others, shimmered in some perfect new world where he alone was the keyholder of meaning.

And so as he stood at the party, there was little doubt about what the gnome told him. He walked over to the guy who had stood in the kitchen with him before. The guy had apparently found some beer. He kept palming one of the bottles on the table, which was indistinguishable from the others except for the liquid inside of it.

“We meet again,” said the guy happily.

“Yeah, we do.” Brendan thought for a moment and then asked the question he already knew the answer to. “You looking for pills?”

“Yeah man, fucking always,” said the guy. “What do you got?”

“Check it out.” Brendan took out the haloperidol pill. It said GG 126 on it. 10 milligrams. “It’s kind of heavy shit, though. It’s an anti-psychotic.”

“Oh, like Xanax and shit. I know all about that. How much?”

“Te—twenty. I got it for 15, but I’ve gotta make money somehow,” said Brendan, acting cool, acting like he knew what he was doing.

“Okay,” said the guy. “I’ll give you 15. I can’t do any more than that.”

“Fine,” said Brendan. “15. Take it with water. And save it until you’re on acid or K or whatever and you want to come down. It’s better than milk.”

“Bottom’s up,” said the guy, with a devil-may-care smile seeping across his lips. “How long does it take to kick in?”

“Trust me,” said Brendan. “You’ll feel it.” Brendan walked away after the handshake, avoiding the Sharpie drawing at the other corner of the room.

Brendan saw what appeared to be specters encircling the bar. The walls started to shake. Brendan could see them shaking.

“It’s the wrath of God. This place is going to crumble like a house of cards,” said the gnome homunculus. “It’s coming down. Like the old song, you know. The walls came tumbling down.”

“We have to get out,” said Brendan. “It’s time to go. It’s time to go.”

A third homunculus, a jukebox flapping its metal mouth open, started to sing. “And you can talk about your men of Gideon, and you can talk about your men of Saul.”

Brendan ran out of the loft, knocking people over if they were in his way. The gaunt homunculus looked on, powerless. Brendan knocked over Lisa.

“You asshole!” shouted Lisa. “Get the fuck out of here.”

Brendan ran out of the loft and looked back up on it.

The jukebox homunculus kept singing. “But there’s none like good old Joshua, at the battle of Jericho.”

The lapis lazuli, the painting, the guy. Brendan saw the imitation cardboard walls collapse and crush the party with his own two eyes. There was no article in the paper the next day.

# The Gummi Worm Man

## *Palm Sunday*



Everyone got to church in time for the PowerPoint presentation. Everyone, that is, except for a couple of unlucky stragglers who had to sit in the two front pews as penance for staying up past 9:30 on Saturday night. Those first two pews were damning; not even Pastor Ted Buckley was holy enough to sit there, let alone some lukewarmers that God would spit out of His mouth someday. Andrew Paulson, who had strayed from the flock a few years back, told everyone who would listen that sitting in those pews “is like swimming in God’s asshole. It’s as hot as shit, and it lasts forever.”

The PowerPoint presentation was remarkable. Steven Dulles, CEO of SD Contracting LLC, had graciously volunteered to “program” it. Church advertisements flooded the projector screen, which rolled down and back up again as if the hand of the Lord Himself guided it. It was like getting there before the movie to see what the next big feature was. The presentation even had animations. One slide announced the all-church picnic next month which featured a tableau of Jesus’ tomb, and the next slide came in from the right side of the screen with an announcement about the big youth meeting in North Dakota, On Fire. Until May 1st, On Fire was only \$500 plus expenses per young adult. After May 1st, it was \$700 per young adult. The next slide, which employed the fade out technique, gave instructions for corporate sponsorship and



tithing. The church was a place of commerce; in fact, there was a booth in the foyer specifically designated for church business. The people in the church spoke about the Protestant work ethic and laughed. At the booth, you could trade money for tokens which could be used inside the church to buy refreshments or toys. Outsiders from the town ecumenical council who had visited the church referred to it as the “money changers table.”

Lester Friedman had tokens flowing out of his pockets with some money in his wallet to spare. Lester was the church’s musical director. The church clinic had cured him of homosexuality, cross dressing, and effeminacy three years ago, and he married Lindy Buckley—the pastor’s daughter—two years ago. Now, he had brainwashed himself. washed that brain until it was milky white, and he geared himself up for singing love songs to God that were catchier than the top 40. He wasn’t much of a composer, and he never really understood how to play instruments, but he sang like a meadowlark. He just had to remember what the counselor had taught his class: “Turn off your inner diva, and tune into God!” This was difficult for Lester. He used to play in a piano bar; now he was God’s man, not some fussy, wimpy, lisping, pansy pantyboy. The glitter and the sequins were gone for the most part: glistening, shattered fragments of a distant past. And he liked it better that way. Yes, he liked it better that way, but sometimes it was hard for him to think about the armor of God without picturing an immaculately chain-mailed soldier with the breastplate of righteousness displaying each chiseled muscle. And after the glory of performing, telling his stories and concocting witticisms onstage to a crowd of bears and twink—yes, it was a difficult transition.

Gary Vandeleer was the pianist, and he shared Les’ remarkable Broadway repertoire: his secret and his secret alone. He had beaten out Mary Woolridge for the spot he coveted on the worship team, probably because the church believed that women should not lead anything in the church other than bake sales or Tuesday night gossip groups. Gary was the one who knew the high note

Lester's voice wavered on. He was the one who had to keep his desire to end each song with jazz hands under wraps, mummified like the body of Lazarus, while Lester paraded himself up and down the stage. He was the one who had to repeat "all music is for the glory of God" on days when Lester got carried away. Like that day a few months ago when Lester was in charge of tinseling the Christmas tree outside the church and started prancing around. Gary almost thought about reporting him to Pastor Buckley for effeminate behavior. He could barely hold it in; his anger seethed. Why did he have to be the masculine one? Lester got all the glory, with all of his lacy frills and happy pills and off-key trills.

Today was one of those days. That morning, Lester had spoken to the stagehands (known in the Catholic church as altar boys) to have them help him carry out his plan. He wanted to make it a very special Palm Sunday for everyone in the audience, so at the beginning of the set, it was Lester who rigged the boxes above the stage with cross-shaped confetti and glitter. He sprinkled in a few rhinestoned Israeli flags to remind everyone that Christians were now anti-Holocaust. One day, a visitor that everyone knew was drunk of the grapes of the vine had come into the church and asked what why God let the Holocaust happen. Even after Pastor Ted talked to him for a while, he wouldn't accept that everything was for the glory of God. Pastor Ted guessed that people just couldn't understand free will without going to seminary.

Lester led the first song as soon as the confetti fell. This is what they sang, accompanied by a melody full of warmth and cheer:

*God is good!  
All the time!  
He put this song of praise!  
In this heart of mine!*

*God is good!  
All the time!*

*And through the darkest night!  
His light will shine!*

*God is good!  
He's so good!  
God is good!  
Oh, so good!  
God is good!  
He's so good!  
All the time!*

Lester unbuttoned his size 54 jacket before the chorus, and the bulge from his stomach unraveled. That was the vice that had controlled his life since his Biblical counseling sessions. Everyone started clapping on the first and third beats of every measure. The particularly dramatic women raised their hands in the air, pretending to touch the face of God, and husbands and children reluctantly followed. Although the atmosphere was one of praise, the audience knew the liturgy well, and the time to get really intimate with God was during the “Worship” portion of the service, not the “Praise.” That came after the greeting routine. Each segment of the service was strictly planned before, and each crew member and performer were given itineraries, like stage hands before a play.

Afterward, the lights on the stage dimmed for a moment, and the lighting director put the backlights up to reveal the cross at the center of the stage. This was the new cross the church purchased the year before, and it was backlit and radiant unlike the old wooden one. It revealed the new prosperity of the church, for God rewarded the holy with prosperity, unless he was testing them like Job. For this special Sunday service, the Women’s Group had carefully decorated the stage with lilies, the Christian flag, and an Israeli flag with “Messiah” written in Hebrew under it. Sue Davidson had nailed three palm branches to the cross in symbolic places to augment its radiance. She had tried pushpins first, but the new cross was so resilient that she had to find a hammer to

bang the nails into the cross until the head of the nails were flush with the strange plastic substance. It took her a while, but after repeated bangs of the hammer and a sore thumb, everyone agreed that it looked beautiful, and there were a few oohs and ahhs.

There was a special praise offering from a musical group composed of three of the elders' daughters afterwards. The group was called Grace Notes, and they performed a song by a contemporary Christian singer. This was controversial. The singer had gotten a divorce from her husband a few years back, and real Christians weren't supposed to get divorced. Besides that, the singer had just released a love song the congregation thought might be to her new lover instead of Jesus. Fortunately, the song was orthodox enough that the congregation didn't seem to mind too much.

Grace Notes performed a pantomime act to the music with elaborate costumes. Two of them put on dark robes during a dramatic portion of the song to pose as demons as they pretended to nail the fatter girl wearing white to the cross. Each motion was carefully plotted to sync in time to the rest of the music, and they incorporated sign language into the performance. At the end, the fatter girl was lying down and then sprung back up, punching the demons and knocking them to the floor. The audience applauded. Christy June was so touched by the performance that her mascara smeared all over her face, and she had to use the brand new box of Kleenex that she had bought that morning to clean herself up for the Lord.

After an awkward pause, Pastor Ted and Lester walked up on stage to the sound of applause from the congregation. This was the "Welcome" portion of the service, where Pastor Ted and Lester did what Lester liked to refer to as a "Christian vaudeville routine."

Pastor Ted began. "Good morning to all of you, God's beautiful children, and what a blessed morning it is, Amen Les?"

"Amen, pastor," agreed Lester, "and it is so good to give

him praise with the sounds of the piano and the lyre.”

“Oh, Lester,” said Pastor Ted with a chuckle. “More like the liar and the piano, am I right everyone?” The crowd let out a delayed laugh. “And if you liked that lovely performance from the Grace Notes, make sure to come back next week for our passion play, where each of those lovely girls will be playing the townspeople.”

It was time for the sermon. Pastor Ted got up to the podium with his wireless headset mic, and he gave a slightly varied version of the sermon he had given the previous Easter. After he was done, Pastor Ted prayed a prayer which was mostly him talking about how he felt. There were drinks and refreshments in the lobby.

**BUD ABBOTT ALWAYS WORE A BLAZER**, a button-up shirt, and slacks on Sunday mornings, and he sat in a pew through each service. His wife Cindy wore floral prints in spring, modest ankle-length sundresses in summer, leaf prints in fall, and snowman blouses over dark dresses in winter. He was impotent, and she was barren. Through rain, sleet, snow, or gloom of night – even on the holy day when the post office was closed – they made the 45-minute drive to Salome Baptist Church.

They were friends with Pastor Buckley, but everyone was friends with Pastor Buckley. Bud always shook his hand at the exit door the firmest out of the entire congregation and told him that the sermon that day “was particularly good today, Pastor Buckley, particularly good.” Cindy would smile with her big teeth at Pastor Buckley and say, “God bless you, Pastor.” Pastor Buckley never knew what to say other than “Thank you, Bud” and “God bless you as well, sister.” Whenever anyone said sister, it reminded Pastor Buckley of Sister Buckley, who had died two years ago. Only a few people knew that her coffin was empty. After three days, she rose again. Pastor Buckley couldn’t tell everyone about his wife’s resurrection. It was only for the elect to know.

After that, they usually went into the foyer with the Davidsons

and Junes and discussed the Davidson and June children. That was what happened this week too. Both Bud and Cindy pretended to be fascinated by Luke's summer camp and Christina's ballet lessons, even though they were all Satanic snot-fingered brats. Then the conversation veered towards church gossip.

"Did you see that Lester Friedman went up for the altar call again this week?" asked Sue Davidson, chuckling mildly. "I think that was the third time this year that he's been born again."

"Hopefully something will change this time around," agreed Christy June, grinning. They all laughed, remembering the days where they used to go up for altar calls every week. Now things were comfortable. Now they knew they were saved once and for all.

A younger couple walked by, and Cindy Abbott called out to them. "Hello, friends!" she cried, her voice raising about three quarters of an octave. "Welcome to the church!"

"Um, thanks," replied the man. "I'm Chris, and this is Norah."

"Hi," said Norah.

"Hello!" shrieked Sue Davidson. "And what's your last name?"

"Uh, Tolling."

"And I'm Norah Paulson."

"Oh," said Sue Davidson. "You're such a lovely couple. Have you gotten one of our welcome packs yet?"

"Yes," said Chris. "Thank you very much."

"Mmm, good," replied Sue Davidson. "Now, are you courting Ms. Paulson, Chris? You both look to be about marrying age!"

Chris laughed. “Oh no, we’re just dating.”

“Oh,” said Sue Davidson. “Oh, I see.”

There was a lull in the conversation.

Christy June broke in. “I also heard that Sister Wilminson is in the hospital again.”

“Oh Sister Wilminson. She is so strong. Such a woman of the Lord. I really think she is the best epitome of the true Proverbs 31 woman,” ventured Ron June.

Christy June agreed. “Yes, such a servant. I think that’s what Philip’s unspoken was during the service.”

Both Chris Tolling and Norah Paulson looked confused. “What do you mean by unspoken?” asked Chris.

Christy June didn’t know whether or not he was serious. “Chris, an unspoken request is when a request is too personal to share with the congregation. It’s only between that person and God.”

Chris was confused. “Then why would you pray for it in front of the whole church?”

This conversation would usually only last for about ten minutes, because Bud had his Sunday school class for next week to prepare for in his office, and Cindy needed to get home to check on the roast. They would usually share a meager kiss goodbye, and Bud would hand her the keys to the station wagon to take home before he went back into Classroom F. Before she left, Cindy would throw that week’s rotten apples into the donation box.

## *Good Friday*



Beth Lewis was one of those nice-to-be-naughty and naughty-to-be-nice girls. She did a very good job of obeying her parents' commandments about chores and homework, and since they trusted her implicitly, she could get away with murder. Of course she didn't ever actually go so far as to murder anyone, but despite Mr. and Mrs. Lewis' harshness toward her younger brother and sister, Beth had her parents off her back.

She began completely taking advantage of this situation when she met Erica. Erica was one of her witnessing friends now. Because Beth went to public school unlike most of her church friends, many of her classmates hadn't asked Jesus into their hearts yet. Erica was one of them.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis became worried about Beth's public school friends after they met Erica at the school spelling bee. The first alarm went off in their heads when Beth told them that Erica was only going to be watching the spelling bee instead of participating. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis believed that spelling was paramount in a young Christian girl's life. Without spelling, endlessly drilling long lists of words before the bee, how could any girl learn the self-discipline required to follow Christ's commandments?

The second sign was the layers of Erica's makeup, which refused to blend into the rest of her skin. Mrs. Lewis always worried about things like this and complained to the board of elders when Nessa, one of the other girls around Beth's age, started wearing skirts with hemlines above the knees. Mrs. Lewis thought Erica looked like a harlot. Mrs. Lewis thought a lot about sex.

This was one of the few times that Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were concerned, so they decided to talk with Beth about it after the "kids"—which is what Beth called her brother and sister—had gone to bed. Mrs. Lewis was especially firm that she didn't "at



all very much like Erica,” and that she would appreciate it if Beth stopped spending time with her. Mr. Lewis used the “one bad apple” analogy he always used, and Beth was sad that she wouldn’t get to see her friend anymore. Beth decided to reference the Great Commission, which Pastor Buckley had given his sermon about that Sunday. Beth plaintively asked her parents, “Doesn’t Jesus want us to witness to people who don’t know about him?” After that, her parents couldn’t protest. They felt guilty enough for not giving to the panhandling missionary that morning and gave Beth a hug and a kiss for being such a good girl. Apparently, some small part of them realized that building an insular community which was based on isolating members from the world was antithetical to their god’s teaching.

There were PG-13 movies at Erica’s house. There were even some rated R movies. Beth was never allowed to watch PG-13 movies, even though she was 13, and her parents even stopped her from watching some PG movies. It was usually only the PG movies with sex in them, though. Beth’s parents didn’t care about her watching violent movies. They thought that people having sex with other people was the dangerous thing. After watching a few of the movies geared towards teenagers, Beth started to think that Erica’s house might be heaven. This went on for a few months. About every other week, Beth would ask permission to sleep over and watch another romantic teen comedy, feeling secretly dirty and simultaneously thrilled at engaging in this kind of anathematic behavior.

One night, Erica said that she had found a copy of a porno movie in her parents’ room when they were upstate the weekend before. Porno movies were for perverts. Beth knew that. She used to read about X-rated movies which changed to NC-17 later on. She read about them in a big film review book her parents kept in the family room. After she confused Felix the Cat with Fritz the Cat in a conversation with her dad, the book disappeared.

“I don’t think we should watch this,” said Beth. “Porn is for pervs

like Jimmy McFall.” Jimmy was one of the froggy kids in their class who always smelled weird. Even though cooties were long forgotten about by the time sixth grade rolled around, Jimmy still had cooties.

Erica wasn’t convinced. “You’re such a prude, Beth. It’s just a movie.”

Beth didn’t know what to do. She was curious, but she remembered what her mom had said about curiosity. It killed her cat Speckles. Speckles was the tabby Beth got as a present from her parents when she was 8, and Speckles died after an ill-fated jump off of their roof. Curiosity was bad.

Beth thought about what her Sunday School teacher Mr. Abbott had taught her about resisting temptation the year before. Mr. Abbott said to always think about Jesus all the time, every second, and everything would be okay.

“C’mon, I’m putting the DVD in now. It’s not even one of the hardcore ones. It’s just like a Skinemax.”

Beth replied, “Erica, I’m going into the other room. I’m sorry, but I’m a Christian, and I don’t think I should watch it. Jesus wouldn’t want me to do this.”

“Jesus wouldn’t want you to do this? What, is Jesus your boyfriend?”

“No, he’s not my boyfriend!” protested Beth. “He is so much more important than a boyfriend could ever be to me.”

“Whatever.” Erica turned on the DVD and sat down. Beth sat down too, knowing that a part of her wanted to watch this. The movie was dull and mechanical, straining bodies and pixellated couches. Both of them watched sex the way some people wanted it to be for the first time. Beth was fascinated but

felt incredibly guilty for what she was doing.

“I bet your boyfriend can’t do that,” laughed Erica.

“He’s not my boyfriend,” said Beth again. “But He loves me like a boyfriend would love me. Like the best boyfriend.”

“I bet you wish you could make out with Jesus, don’t you?” prodded Erica, laughing.

At that moment, Beth got an idea. Mr. Abbott told her in a private conversation that if she was being tempted by boys, it was especially important to think about Jesus. That way, even if she was ever raped or succumbed to temptation before she was married, she would be thinking about Jesus, and He would make it okay. Beth thought for another second about what Mr. Abbott did after that, and what she did, and how he said that it made it all okay.

Beth frowned. She thought for a moment and said, “Sometimes when I think about doing things like this, I think about Him instead.”

Erica started giggling madly. Was she talking too much? Beth’s parents told her to try to witness at every given opportunity, and this was the perfect opportunity. “He wants me to feel good, but He doesn’t want me to do bad things to feel good. What’s so funny?” Beth was embarrassed. Mr. Abbott had told her that was the right thing to do, and that if she was tempted about boys, she should touch herself and think about Jesus instead. Was that wrong?

Erica kept laughing. “Jesus is dead, Beth! He can’t be your boyfriend. Plus, that’s just weird. You’re a person, and he’s, well... He’s a god!”

“It isn’t weird,” protested Beth. “Don’t you think He’s handsome?”

“Well sure He’s handsome, but you’re missing the point.”

Beth was wearing pumpkin pajamas. Erica was wearing an orange top with black sweatpants.

“Watch,” said Beth. “I’ll show you.” Beth started rubbing herself through her PJs. She looked at Erica until Erica started doing the same thing. Beth closed her eyes, moved her bottom lip to one side, and bit it. “Oh God,” she said. “Oh my God.” Beth opened her eyes for a minute, realizing that she wasn’t alone this time, and asked, “Do you know why whenever you watch a movie and people are having sex, they always say God or Jesus?”

Erica didn’t know.

Beth said, “It’s because they realize that only God or Jesus could make them feel that good. But sometimes, if they’re not married and they’re cheating on their husband or wife, it’s just Satan tricking them into thinking that they’re feeling good when they’re feeling spiritually empty. That’s what my teacher says. Erica, I don’t want to watch the movie. But if you have these kind of feelings, there is a right way for you to express them. That’s what Mr. Abbott told me. He gave me this.” Beth went over to her backpack and pulled out a white pocket-sized book. The pages were slightly frayed, and “New Testament: New International Version” was imprinted on the cover in gold. “Mr. Abbott, my Sunday school teacher, gave this to me. He told me that the best way to keep temptation away from you is to keep the Word of God close. And this is as close as Jesus can get to you.”

Beth started to stroke her friend’s skin with the soft bound cover of her pocket New Testament, moving it down her body slowly. Erica pulled back sharply and stared at her with a complete lack of understanding in her eyes, but Beth kept going. She kissed the cover and let the book drift down her body, gliding against her flesh. It ran past her stomach and brushed against and inside her

creases. Beth whispered, "I want to know you more, Jesus. I want you feel you closer to me."

"What the hell are you doing, Beth?" Erica shout-whispered. "You're so fucked up, I can't believe this. This is so fucked up." Erica ran up the stairs to her bedroom.

"Erica, wait! I want to show you this. I want to show you how this can feel when you do it right, when you do it in a holy way!" Beth was afraid for a moment that Erica would get her parents and have them come down. But she knew God would protect her. She knew God wouldn't let them come down.

"Lord Jesus, you make me feel so good." With two fingers inside herself and one hand stroking herself with the white book, Beth started to envision crosses with her eyes closed, Jesus standing naked before her. "I want your love, Jesus, I want you to come into my heart. I beg for you to come into my heart!" She came hard on the carpet, and then she rested in her pumpkin pajamas on the floor.

## *Sleepy Saturday*



Everyone was asleep in the neighborhood. Everyone slept late on Sleepy Saturday. Everyone except for Mr. Abbott. Mr. Abbott used this as his morning quiet time. There were too many human distractions throughout the day, and it was vital for Mr. Abbott to wade through each distraction until he reached the point that Christ alone was his sole thought. That was the only way to truly understand the divine revelations and esoterica. That along with the sacrament.

Mr. Abbott gave his pupils gummi worms at the start of each lesson. Mrs. Abbott always bought the generic store brand to show she was frugal and a good homemaker. The kids never noticed that they were generic. They never noticed this, but they would notice what Mr. Abbott was about to do the next day. Mr. Abbott used to be a chemistry teacher before he started working in the church front office, and he knew a lot about chemistry. There was a very special chemical that he and only a few other people knew about that was called Salvinorin A. Mr. Abbott decided a few years before that he wanted his class and his class alone to have a very special treat. He did a lot of other kinds of grown-up stuff on nights before the services that his students didn't know about.

Now some men and women are also interested in chemicals, but they are bad people, because they took chemicals that they weren't supposed to. These kinds of chemicals are called illegal chemicals. They make people go crazy. But Mr. Abbott's chemical was very legal and a very good chemical. It made people closer to God. He knew the children would like this chemical.

The chemical was called Salvinorin A. Mr. Abbott knew lots about the chemical. For instance, he knew that the molecular formula was  $C_{23}H_{28}O_8$  and its molar mass was 432.464. He also knew, of course, that it was a selective kappa opioid receptor agonist.

It was very difficult to synthesize, and Mr. Abbott spent many hours on it in his homemade lab. Not even Mrs. Abbott really knew how he did it. Mrs. Abbott didn't like to take this chemical. She said it made her go bonkers. But Mr. Abbott would sometimes take the chemical and then read the newspaper. He thought it made him understand the newspaper better, as long as the noises weren't there when he took it. Mr. Abbott decided that he was going to put some of the chemical in that day. It would be a very small amount of the chemical, but a little of the chemical could go a long way! He decided he would put about 1500 micrograms in each gummi worm to give the pupils a special surprise. That sounds like a lot of micrograms, but it is actually a very small amount of the chemical.

Mr. Abbott knew that Salvinorin A was the secret communion bread which Christ Himself served to his disciples during the Last Supper. He knew this beyond the shadow of a doubt. How did Mr. Abbott know that Salvinorin A was the secret communion bread of Christ? It was because Christ Himself told Mr. Abbott that it was. Mr. Abbott and Christ had a special relationship. Mr. Abbott would talk to Christ directly at many points during the day. When there was a traffic jam and Mr. Abbott had to get to work on time, Mr. Abbott prayed for Christ to take away enough traffic to help him get there before his boss caught him. When Mr. Abbott got to work on time, he praised God. When he couldn't get to work on time, with horrible Satanic cars in front of him, he knew that he had sinned and had to ask Christ for atonement. Mr. Abbott sometimes heard Christ call him Bud. It was a private joke between them. Since Mr. Abbott's first name was Bud, he knew that he was Christ's buddy. His Bud, His servant, doing his will upon Earth the best way he knew how. He knew this through faith, through not letting any stray thought distract him from his path.

Mr. Abbott had been reading too, and his readings confirmed what he knew was Christ's will. Just to make sure he wasn't being fooled by one of Satan's tricks, he knew to test each spirit that

spoke to him in his mind. He remembered 1 John 4:1-3: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” Mr. Abbott knew that because this spirit confessed that Jesus Christ is from God and actually said it was Jesus, it had to be Jesus according to John’s test. And if this spirit had told him that Salvinorin A was the hidden Communion bread, then that meant Jesus had to help him make it. When those bad spirits came, the ones who told him that he was wrong and Christianity wasn’t true, he knew it was the spirit of the antichrist.

Mr. Abbott had done his research, and he had created a lab in what used to be the guest bedroom. It was nothing as extravagant as he had wanted, but he knew the Lord commanded to make use of what you have, so he went to work anyway. He had done many extractions in his lab, and by now, he had it down to a science. The first step was to crush the *salvia divinorum* leaves and put them in a cup. He had a coffee cup with a Promise Keepers logo on it. Promise Keepers is a men’s only organization devoted to ensuring the primacy of man in a family’s spiritual world. As St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” It was right for men to be the head of their households, because the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. Mrs. Abbott understood this too. It had taken a few years to convince her, but after enough scriptural research on the issue, Mr. Abbott had complete dominance over his household. He made the decisions, he made the Abbotts’ schedule, and he alone ruled the house with



deference to his beloved God. That is why he chose the Promise Keepers mug to make his tincture. That is why he could make Mrs. Abbott eat the holy sacred Communion bread. He alone knew the secret. He was a prophet, just as Ezekiel, seeing the unknown and infinite.

The second step of making the extract, the purest form of Salvinorin A, was pouring acetone on each leaf as a solvent. After doing this, it was important to wash the leaves with a solvent twice more. That way, any chemicals outside of the element—any that strayed from the path of pure Salvinorin—would be flushed out. They would be cast away like chaff from grain.

After this process, it was Mr. Abbott's duty to combine the solvent and comb through it to discover any stray particles. As he weeded out the unholy and concentrated the holy into one simultaneously fluid and solid creation, the room was filled with smoke from the burning of holy incense that Mr. Abbott breathed through his nostrils. It was three in one, just as the Trinity was three in one. God showed his continuous symbology in mysterious ways, and this was one such way. The Trinity was explained to Mr. Abbott once as being like water. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are just as water vapor, liquid water, and ice are one. They are composed of the same material. They are three in one. He contemplated this for a moment, and blessed God for the occult information which was bestowed upon him alone. *No one else truly appreciates the sacrament, thought Mr. Abbott. It is known only to me. They gulp down their wafer crumbs and drink their peasant fruit juice or spoiled grapes, but I am the beholder of the divine secret, by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.* He thought of the mysteries that would be unlocked in the children's minds as they tasted his special mixture for the first time. He would disguise it, of course. That way, the impure in the church who had not been prepared for God's secret knowledge would be content in their ignorance. He knew the proper mask, the necessary façade that would let them taste of the Communion without influence from the evil spirits. How much the children

were sure to appreciate his gift! They would thank him for showing them the light, and upon the realization of God's spirit, someone's life was never the same again. They would not return to their worldly ways. *Everything will work out nicely*, thought Mr. Abbott.

Next, the tannin particles which were part of the mixture needed to be filtered out. The sedimentary element of the tannin, the fine brown, was removed. This process supposedly took about 12 hours, but Mr. Abbott had gotten a message from God that it shouldn't take any more than a few moments due to His power. If God could make the sun stand still in the sky like he did for Joshua, surely such a minor miracle as this would be possible.

Mr. Abbott thought about how his life would have been different if he would have received one of these divine transmissions when he was still in Sunday School. Surely, things would have been different. He might have been exalted on a throne, high above the Babylon which surrounded him. As he was stirring, he reminded himself that it was not God's will for Samuel to be king, but for Saul. There were so many things going on in Mr. Abbott's mind. Sometimes he thought for a moment that it was God's voice that was telling him things, but sometimes he found later that it wasn't God's voice at all.

He put a fan in front of the mug, trying to get the mixture to evaporate more quickly. This was wise thinking. The liquid began burning at about 150 degrees.

Mr. Abbott began having a vision. He was excited; they usually didn't come on this quickly when he was just breathing the incense. Sometimes it caused him to tremor and for his body to boil up. That was what he called the holy hot to himself. No one that he had ever spoken to about the holy hot seemed to know what he was talking about. Perhaps he was the first one in history to feel it. *Certainly, this sort of feeling will be recognized in future epistles, future letters to the church which will be deemed in*

*accordance with the perfect divine will*, thought Mr. Abbott.

He thought about Beth. What a wonderful wife she would make some man, if only she were blessed by the sacred Communion. This would only be a process of a few months, perhaps. A regular dosage of Mr. Abbott's tincture when finished was easily enough to set someone's mind upon heavenly things. Maybe he could recommend to Beth's parents that she needed additional spiritual training. They would certainly agree to something that would be for the good of their child. Then he could train her in the ways of the Lord without fear of unnecessary interference. This would be perfect. She was so young but so mature. What a Proverbs 31 woman she would make.

Isopropanol was needed to perform the next step of the extraction. Mr. Abbott thought for a moment. This was the contemplative part of the procedure. *For all of this work, I hope the students appreciate it.* There was the naphtha next and washing the chlorophyll and at this point, the steps all ran together. He trusted God for this part, because God was the one who really knew what the best way to make his Communion was. Mr. Abbott was just the messenger. Mr. Abbott was just his servant.

## *Easter Sunday*



It was the first day of small groups for this year, and Mr. Abbott smiled like a gargoyle. If you haven't been to Salome Baptist before, you wouldn't know about the gargoyles. When the church built the new building, the chief architect had slipped the gargoyles into the blueprint at the last minute. It wasn't approved by Pastor Buckley or the board of elders. Too Catholic. There was something that bothered Pastor Buckley about them too. One year he had gone up on the roof himself to chip away at them with a broken piece of metal, but God had told him to get down from the roof before he fell. And so the gargoyles still sat at the top of the building, paralyzed by the cross on the steeple. They were paralyzed, but they were also gory and monstrous, glorified terrors under the command of the most High.

There was reason behind Mr. Abbott's smile. With each new class that walked through the door, the first thing Mr. Abbott did was train his flock to stand up at the exact moment he walked through the classroom door. He said that it was a matter of showing respect for him, and he marched the kids out the door and back in again if not everyone stood up at the moment he entered. This happened until everyone had it just right. Every year, there were always a few sprinkled around the room who couldn't get it until the 4th or 5th try. They were the ones who were lost in thoughts of football practice the next day, the friend's birthday party that afternoon, or their latest videogame save point.

At this point Mr. Abbott said, "I can keep doing this all day until everyone stands at the same time." He said it so kindly that it made the kids hurt. After that, everyone got it.

But Mr. Abbott was not a cruel master. Before the class, he promised Beth that he would give her the special titles of "Line Leader" and "Prayer Warrior." Beth was one of his special students. He had had a lot of students like Beth, and he still sent

some of them cute e-mails with dancing animals and notes about the coolest new Christian rock music. He knew they liked that kind of stuff.

Beth was special, though. He could already see that she was beginning to blossom sexually. In fact, he had told her that it was her duty as a woman to submit to God first, and then to submit to man. It was very important that she did not become a traitor to the hierarchy God had so carefully set up for society. Men received their instruction from God, and women received their instruction from men. Mr. Abbott enjoyed instructing Beth. He hoped that their relationship could continue to grow to help Beth's eyes become as open to the spiritual world as physically possible.

It was time for Mr. Abbott to pass out the gummi worms to the class. He was a funny teacher, and when it came time for Beth Lewis to get her gummi worm, he dangled it in front of her lips instead of handing it to her. Mr. Abbott watched as Beth slurped the neon green and yellow gummi worm into her tart, pink mouth, and everyone else laughed.

After passing out the gummi worms, Mr. Abbott began the lesson for the week. The lesson he had picked for today would be the parable of the sheep and the goats that Jesus had preached. Mr. Abbott had a sticky board in front of the class, and it was helpful for him to instruct the children by using pictures to spark their imaginations.

Mr. Abbott began the lesson by talking about how one day, Jesus will be on the throne in front of the whole world. At that moment, He would separate the sheep from the goats. Mr. Abbott read this part from the Bible to give it further emphasis. He had a great Bible reading voice; Mrs. Abbott said that was one of the things which attracted her the most to him. When Mr. Abbott read the Bible, he believed everything he was reading.

“Matthew 25, verses 32 and 33,” said Mr. Abbott, with a televangelist’s sense of elocution and timing. “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” Mr. Abbott stuck a flock of sheep on the right side of the throne on the sticky board, which had no one sitting on it in the drawing, and a single lone goat on the left side of him. He had forgotten that from the perspective of the throne looking out at the sheep and the goats, the sheep would be on the right, and the goats would be on the left. It was a silly mistake; left was right and right was left.

Jordan Peters raised his hand high in the air, and Mr. Abbott called on him. “Yes, you, in the purple sweater,” said Mr. Abbott, a little upset that he had been interrupted so soon into his sermon.

Jordan, one of the younger students in the small group, said that he had gone on a field trip with his class to a farm, and they had gotten to pet a goat while they were there. Before Mr. Abbott had a chance to respond, a few of Jordan’s friends said, “Cooooo!”

Mr. Abbott decided to bring everyone’s attention back to the lesson by skipping the part about the sheep and going right to the goats. “No, Jordan,” said Mr. Abbott, smiling condescendingly. “Goats are an accursed animal of God. In church history, we read that in the Middle Ages, goats used to talk, and they used to whisper horrible things in the ears of saints at night. Here is what Jesus has to say to the goats.” Mr. Abbott found his place in the Bible again.

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord,

when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

After the reading, Mr. Abbott noticed the shift in the first few students he had given the worms to. This was the first phase of the homoousias, the period of revelation, when each of the children would begin to receive the prophecies from God. Even though the 1500 microgram dosage he had put into the worms was typically an adult dosage, he knew that these children of God were responsible enough in the spirit to receive a testimony from the Most High. Their eyes began to shift, and Jordan and some of the others began to talk in a strange way. That's how Mr. Abbott knew that the communion was taking place. Some of the children began to speak in what Mr. Abbott regarded as the angelic tongue, a language which could only be translated by the Holy Spirit. In fact, Mr. Abbott knew that there were many angelic tongues, many different languages. The cherubim spoke differently than the seraphim, but each was understandable to the other. Mr. Abbott did not speak like the angels; he spoke in the tongue of God. That way, he could avoid being tempted against revolution in heaven just as the Light-Bearer was. But children like Jordan were beginning to babble; when someone received the sacrament who was not ready to become one flesh with God, they began to speak in the unholy language that the builders of the tower spoke in before God confused their languages. This worried Mr. Abbott. It worried Jordan too. Jordan began crying out, "I don't want to be a goat! Goats are bad! Goats have horns just like the Devil!" Jordan was worried. Mr. Abbott saw that some of the other children were getting worried about Jordan, and they looked confused too. Mr. Abbott wasn't sure what to do.

But some of the children were speaking so beautifully. Their visions had obviously been guided by God. They were bowing

down to God, prostrated in a beautiful deference. Their eyes had been opened, and they were responding in the way which all men should: with an overwhelmed soul. Some of their visions were shining brightly; Beth's in particular was. But he needed them to be quiet for a moment. Mr. Abbott thought.

"Children, you remember naptime in preschool, don't you? Everyone needs to lie down just like naptime in preschool. We've already had snacks, and that means it's now time for you to rest and concentrate on listening to the Bible story I'm telling you. Everyone needs to be quiet right now."

It took them a while, but thanks to the example of most of the children who were still lucid, the whole room was lying on their backs in just a few moments.

"The goats are disgusting, aren't they children? You don't want to be a goat, do you? They eat the grass, they fight each other with their horrible horns." Mr. Abbott had eaten three of the gummi worms a few minutes before, just to ensure that he would have the fullest spirit of Communion possible, and he was seeing a brilliant light in his eyelid visions. "They are some of the dirtiest and stubbornest animals in the world. You want to be like sheep, don't you?"

Most of the children were silent, remembering the command to be quiet, but some said "Yes!"

Mr. Abbott responded to the good children with a smile. "That's right, children. Sheep are beautiful animals, and they are God's creatures. They do not know where they are being led, but they obediently follow the shepherd's commands. We are all members of God's faithful flock. And any sheep who strays from the flock, God tells us he will leave the 99 sheep who are in the pasture until he finds the lost sheep. So now, you know that if you ever stray and try to become a goat, God will hunt you down and bring you back to the fold in his loving arms." Mr. Abbott was surprised



at his own eloquence; surely he was being guided by the spirit, as he was usually reluctant to talk and share the visions that he received from God with others for fear that they would succumb to demon gossip and spread horrible rumors about him.”

Mr. Abbott thought it was time for a song. He grabbed the guitar that sat in the corner of the meeting room and began playing. It was difficult for him at first; unfortunately, God had never bestowed him with the gift of music, probably to ensure that his ego would not prevent him from being a careful follower. Music was the trap that ensnared so many. It could drive demons out like David drove Saul’s demons out, but it could also be used as an egocentric tool of evil. After a few tries, he got the chords down to the song.

“Sing with me, children!”

*I don’t want to be a hypocrite  
I don’t want to be a hypocrite,  
‘cause a hypocrite ain’t hip with it!  
I don’t want to be a hypocrite.*

Mr. Abbott repeated the verse again so the children could hear it. It was call and response, and they didn’t understand that. So he guided them through it a third time, until their voices weakly began repeating his own.

*I don’t want to be a Sadducee  
I don’t want to be a Sadducee  
‘cause a Sadducee is sad, you see!  
I don’t want to be a Sadducee.*

“Better, children! Keep going!” said Mr. Abbott with an encouraging tone. Some of their voices started to get stronger on the second verse, and Mr. Abbott began laughing at the thought of the absurd pun.

*I don't want to be a goat, nope.  
I don't want to be a goat, nope.  
'Cause a goat just wants to mope, yep!  
I don't want to be a goat, nope.*

*I just want to be a sheep, baa baa baa  
I just want to be a sheep, baa baa baa  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
I just want to be a sheep, baa baa baa*

*I just want to be a sheep, baa baa baa  
I just want to be a sheep, baa baa baa  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
I just want to be a sheep, baa baa baa*

After the song, some of the children started to come to their senses. Mr. Abbott thought of them as beautiful dreams; it was the cosmic consciousness taking a hold of his mind and teaching it transcendancy. He started walking around the room and guiding the children through their visions. Jordan and his friend Nick were having a difficult time. They should have known better than to join a small group if they were not committed Christians yet. Eating of the pure Communion bread was a blessing for the saved and a nightmare for the unsaved. They probably witnessed the horrors of hell, and now due to their ignorance, Mr. Abbott had to guide them through the trip.

“I just want to be a sheep,” cried Jordan. “I just want to be a sheep, not a goat. I don’t like goats anymore, but they keep coming into my head and it’s like they’re ramming me with their horns! And I feel like I’m being pulled to the left! I feel like somebody’s pulling me to the left.”

*Demonic possession*, thought Mr. Abbott. It was the one thing that could cause people to feel that they were being pulled by a force outside of the Heavenly Father’s. *Damn them.*

Mr. Abbott began casting the demon out of Jordan, and as soon as Nick started crying, he casted the demon out of Nick too. “By the power of Jesus Christ, I cast you out! I cast out the demons of jealousy, avarice, sexual sin, and all moral depravity! There will be no goats from this room on the Judgment Day!” shouted Mr. Abbott, getting annoyed. “All will be saved by the power of Christ Jesus!”

Some of the children started screaming “Jesus!” and hugging each other while they cried. Mr. Abbott had read about things like this happening during the Second Reformation. Jonathan Edwards led prayer groups through acceptance of the Spirit, and entire rooms began to quake. This was a new reformation. This was a reclaiming of God’s church as it was meant to be, directed by Bud Abbott, accepting his Holy Communion.

The children sat in a circle after some of the chaos had settled. Mr. Abbott told the children that they had been touched by the Holy Spirit, and he went around the circle asking each child what their experience had been like.

Mr. Abbott could tell who the good children and bad children were by the way they reacted to the Holy Communion. He remembered the words of Paul to the church in Corinth: “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

That was how he could judge them, how he could discern who was truly ready for Communion and who needed to be cast away like chaff from grain.

Jordan was first. Mr. Abbott thought he might be able to turn Jordan’s negative experience into a positive one for the rest of the class. “There were goats everywhere! I walked into a goat

and when I did, it was like a passage into another one. Like every goat was a goat door to the next goat. And they kept ramming me with their horns, and every time they did, it felt like Satan, it felt like my hands were getting pricked like Jesus' hands by nails. And the room kept pushing down on me. It was like gravity... it felt like gravity. But it wasn't gravity. Gravity pushes you down, but this... it kept pushing me to the left. I felt bad, I felt wrong. I was scared... I'm still scared."

Mr. Abbott grimaced. "That's enough, Jordan. Thank you for your answer, but some people just aren't ready to receive the gifts of the Spirit. Jordan, I think you need to pray hard this week. God is good, and you must accept his gifts without being tempted by the forces of evil and injustice in this world. Nick, you're next. I hope you had a greater experience than Jordan did."

Nick felt guilty. He knew his experience had been just as bad, no, even worse than Jordan's had been. He knew he could tell his experience with the doves morphing into monsters, seeing the horrific kaleidoscopes in the shadows, but he knew Mr. Abbott wouldn't be happy with that answer. He knew Mr. Abbott thought speaking in tongues was the rarest gift of the spirit, and he wanted to make Mr. Abbott happy. So he decided to speak in tongues. His parents had taught him a song when he was younger about a baby elephant. They taught it to him in English and in Japanese. In English it went

*Little elephant, little elephant,  
You have a long long nose.  
Yes sir, my parents have long noses, too.*

In Japanese it went

*Zou-san, zou-san  
O-hana ga nagai no ne  
Sou yo, kaasan mo  
Nagai no yo*

Nick started speaking the words loudly and then singing them until Mr. Abbott told Nick that he had done a wonderful job, and it was obvious that the Communion had been effective on him. Mr. Abbott said that he was going to make Nick the spiritual warrior for the week, and that he could help the rest of the class battle evil spirits through prayer. Nick breathed a sigh of relief.

The other children were still confused. A few of them couldn't talk yet, and they were still sprawled out on their backs. Beth was one of the ones still on her back, and Mr. Abbott thought to himself that she must have had such a powerful experience that she was still in prayer thanking God for it. Mr. Abbott told everyone to spend a few minutes praying for people in their life who needed God's help until the end of class.

After a few minutes, Mr. Abbott stood back up. There was still a drowsy, confused feeling all around the room. "Now children," Mr. Abbott said, smiling. "You all have to agree not to tell your parents about our class today. Remember, you are God's prophets, and some things need to be kept secret between God, his leaders, and his people." He winked at Beth, who was sitting up again, and she smiled back at Mr. Abbott.

"Do you all remember the story of Joseph and his beautiful coat?" Mr. Abbott asked. The class nodded, and Mr. Abbott continued. "This vision is just like Joseph's dreams. When he told his dreams to his brothers, they got angry and jealous with him. This vision that you have had after the Communion we have had together is also like Joseph's beautiful coat. Don't tell anyone else around, or you won't be able to wear your beautiful coat anymore. God will stop giving you visions if you tell. Please, children, this is very important." Mr. Abbott continued his monologue until he was convinced that his class could be trusted. Then he let them out, giving each one a hug on the way out the door to show Christ's love. Each hug was given according to the children's gifts.

**EACH MEMBER OF THE CONGREGATION** was strongly encouraged to conduct an outreach ministry for Easter. Pastor Buckley had solemnly requested that they bring as many non-believers, atheists, Mormons, agnostics, Catholics, environmentalists, pro-abortion Christians, and Lutherans to the church as possible for the passion play. The whole church had been involved in decoration. Lester had dreamt up the biggest fanfare for the Palm Sunday scene as he could, and they even had a huge white horse for Jesus to ride in on at the end! One of the parishioners owned a stable, and they had the horse brought in just for tonight. It was all so exciting! The whole church was glowing with a radiance that could only come from the love of their God.

Children were given Easter baskets with bunnies and marshmallow Peeps on their way in so that they could have something sweet to snack on throughout the play. In fact, unlike past years, they had made the passion play free this year. Before, you had to buy a \$10 ticket to support the church, but they wanted to bring as many fresh new faces into the chapel as possible this year. Chris Tolling and Norah Paulson were in attendance.

Each choreographed song and dance went swimmingly, with Lester's voice rising up to the heights of Gary Vandeleer's playing, the songs that he had slaved over with God's illumination for each chord. C7, G, C7, 7 like the number of God, like the number of Heaven. Nothing could go wrong.

Pastor Buckley was Jesus for the play this year. The lookalike Jesus they had hired for the previous years had to move to Kansas for a new job, so Pastor Buckley donned the Velcro-on beard and sandals for the play. It was perfect. He looked almost exactly like the traditional Western depiction of Jesus. Kids munched on Twix bars and wives looked up with their carefully prepared Kleenex packs at the right moment.

But in the midst of the perfection, there was something stirring up in Bud Abbott's heart that night. He kept thinking that people

were looking at him funny, especially the parents of the children in his class. Maybe it was Satan, tempting him with guilt. He knew he was blameless. He had already seen that the Holy Communion he had blessed the children's hearts with was from God. Why did the guilt keep streaming back? Maybe God was allowing him to be tempted, like Job. Maybe after he finally freed himself from these trials, after he had repented in sackcloth and ashes, he would be blessed just like Job, with double the riches he had before.

As Bud sat in the pew next to Cindy in her new floral print dress, he realized what the feelings were about. Bud was doing what God told him, yes. It was the rest of the congregation that had failed God. They were just like the unwholesome, unworthy churches that Paul had preached to again and again. Bud prayed to God to receive complete instructions and guidance from Him. "God, it is your humble servant Bud Abbott. I wish to be made a pure vessel of you, without human interference. Help me to do your perfect will on this earth without limitations or any interference. I pray that you make me your prophet, that when I speak to these people, I might show your complete grace and glory."

On stage, Judas (Christy June's husband) was betraying Jesus (Pastor Buckley) for thirty pieces of silver, which is equivalent to about \$25 in modern US currency.

Bud received the answer from God. He was to be as a Solomon of the modern age, equipped with the wisdom to rule God's will in any situation. And he saw that these people were wicked and sinful. Bud had taken another dose of Communion before the passion play to ensure that he was fully equipped to deal with any of Satan's snares that might try to entangle him throughout the evening.

Now Pastor Buckley was walking down the aisle passing the pews, carrying a cross to the stage, wearing Birkenstocks and a fake beard. Birkenstocks and a fake beard. Bud stood up and shouted, "You monster, you hypocrite, you unholy apparition!

I am Jesus! I am the Spirit of God Incarnate, given instructions by Him on how to rule this Earth and govern this planet! Come before me, all you peoples of the Lord, and I will bestow unto you the blessings of the Communion that I have so graciously been given by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!”

One of the elders shouted, “Someone stop him!” His wife stood in horror as Bud shouted unintelligibly. There were nervous murmurs in the audience and the play was stopped. Some of the men rushed towards Bud to try to calm him down while someone called security. Bud was fighting against the men, invoking the holy language of his sacred Communion, pointing angrily at his pastor who was carrying the cross.

“Benla kasha neh hum!” screamed Bud. “Libo pentaba! Kasha kasha lay bata laba! Nomibus pen shele bektabal tamon meka tenko lay kasha! Benla kasha neh hum! Kasha!”

Bud was dragged out of the sanctuary, the carpet burning his back.



## *Next Easter*



Bud Abbott was convicted by a state judge for sexual assault of a minor and distribution of illicit substances to minors. He would serve a term of 15 years in prison. As the police officers walked him from the courtroom to his cell, he realized that everything would be fine. He remembered the story from Acts that told of Paul and Silas being imprisoned. They were beaten and flogged naked. At midnight, Paul and Silas felt a great earthquake around them. Their chains fell off, and their guards hurriedly rushed to the cell, since they thought they would be punished for the prisoners' escape. They soon made friends with one of the jailors and converted him and his family to Christ after the earthquake. They stayed in the cell for the night, and the next morning, the city officials sent word that they were free to go. Paul refused to leave until he and Silas were escorted from the jail. Escorts came and walked them out of the city to be on their way.

Bud knew that's how it would be for him too. Jesus Himself acknowledged the reward of those who were persecuted because of Him. So when Bud heard the jail door slam, it was not a closing, but an opening.

*“Loft Party” was published in August of 2010 in Unheard Magazine (www.unheardmag.com), no longer online/in print.*

*“On Bread Alone” was published in September of 2010 in Divine Dirt Quarterly (www.divinedirtquarterly.com)*

*“Surd Evil” is forthcoming in Issue #3 of Kerouac’s Dog Magazine. (www.kerouacsdogmag.com)*

*This chapbook was laid out using Adobe InDesign CS5 using Gentium Book Basic for body text and Rose Caps for decorated initials.*

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